

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 054466

FOLLOWING REPEAT TEHRAN 1995 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BEIRUT

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QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 1995

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11653: GDS

TAGS: PINS, IZ, IR

SUBJ: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF IRAN-IRAQ BORDER CLASHES

REF: THERAN 1786 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY: IRANIAN MILITARY ACTIONS ON IRAQI FRONT HAVE BEEN DECISIVE AND FIRM, BUT DIPLOMATIC AND MEDIA SUPPORT HAS BEEN MILD. WHILE IRAN WISHES TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON BAGHDAD, IT DOES NOT SEEM TO WISH TO PROVOKE UNFAVORABLE REACTION FROM IRANIAN PUBLIC OR OTHER ARABS. WE BELIEVE RESTRAINT WILL CONTINUE TO BE DOMINANT ALTHOUGH BORDER SKIRMISHES LIKELY TO CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH OUR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AS TO PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED DURING RECENT IRAN-IRAQ BORDER CLASH MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO ANALYZE WHY IT HAPPENED, WE BELIEVE TENTATIVE JUDGMENTS MAY BE
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USEFUL. IRAN HAS PURSUED A TWO-SIDED POLICY WHICH REFLECTS, WE

THINK, CONFLICTING BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES FOR GOI.

2. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE REPORTS, IRAQIS PROBABLY STARTED MAJOR INCIDENTS IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH BY SHOOTING FIRST. HOWEVER, FIGHTING REACHED SERIOUS LEVEL IN LARGE PART BECAUSE IRANIANS PUSHED BACK VERY HARD. ASSERTED CAUSE OF EARLY FEBRUARY INCIDENTS NEAR MEHREN (SW OF KERMANSHAHR) WAS IRANIAN ROAD BUILDING ON IRAQI-CLAIMED TERRITORY. AT THAT TIME, IRANIANS SHOWED NO DISPOSITION TO DISCUSS IRAQI COMPLAINTS. DURING ENSUING BATTLE FEBRUARY 10, IRANIANS ARE SAID TO HAVE CROSSED INTO IRAQ AND REMAINED THERE FOR SOME TIME. SUBSEQUENTLY, BOTH SIDES HAVE MOVED CONSIDERABLE HEAVY EQUIPMENT INTO BORDER AREA.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, DURING THIS PERIOD OF INTERMITTENT FIGHTING AND TENSION, IRANIANS HAVE SENT THEIR AMBASSADOR TO BAGHDAD AND SHAH RECEIVED IRAQI AMBASSADOR IN AUDIENCE. PRESS AND GOI OFFICIALS HAVE PLAYED FIGHTING IN VERY LOW KEY AND THERE HAS BEEN NO EFFORT TO WHIP UP PUBLIC SENTIMENT ON THIS ISSUE. DESPITE SERIOUS PROVOCATIONS AND LOSSES, IRAN HAS HELD LARGELY TO GENDARMERIE DEFENSE BACKED UP BY ARTILLERY AND HAS NOT FULLY COMMITTED GROUND OR AIR FORCE . (AIRCRAFT WERE USED FOR LIMITED RECONNAISSANCE ONLY.) IRAN READILY AGREED TO AND HAS OBSERVED CEASE FIRE AFTER MOST RECENT FIGHTING.

4. WE SEE FOLLOWING POLITICAL FACTORS AS POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS OF APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES IN GOI TREATMENT OF IRAQ PROBLEM:

A. IRANIANS WISH TO KEEP DESPISED IRAQI REGIME OFF BALANCE TO MAXIMUM EXTENT. BAGHDAD IS SEEN AS IRAN'S PRINCIPAL EXTERNAL THREAT AND CHIEF SUPPORT FOR TERRORISTS AND OTHER INTERNAL DISSIDENTS. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO DEFINITE EVIDENCE, IT SEEMS LOGICAL THAT IRANIANS CAN HAVE NO WISH FOR IRAQIS TO PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTION TO KURDISH PROBLEM, THEREBY RELEASING ENERGIES THAT COULD BE USED AGAINST IRAN OR IN SUPPORT OF GULF SUB-VERSION. IF IRAQI TROOPS WERE DRAWN AWAY TO BORDER DEFENSE, BAGHDAD MIGHT HAVE MORE DIFFICULT TIME IN PUTTING ACROSS ITS KURDISH AUTONOMY PLAN. HOWEVER, AS STATED REFTTEL, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IRAN IS MOTIVATED BY FEAR THAT KURDISH AUTONOMY

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WILL PROVE ATTRACTION FOR IRANIAN KURDS.

B. IRANIAN ARMED FORCES HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN LITTLE DISPOSED TO TOLERATE IRAQI BREACHES OF BORDER PEACE. BY MAINTAINING PRESSURE ON IRAQ, IRAN IS LETTING ITS NEIGHBOR KNOW THAT IT WILL HAVE TO SHOW GENEROSITY ON RIVER AND BORDER DEMARCATION DISPUTES IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE NORMAL RELATIONS. WE HAVE IMPRESSION DESIRE FOR RESOLUTION THESE PROBLEMS IS STRONGER

AMONG IRAQIS THAN IRANIANS.

C. PARTIALLY EXPLAINING IRANIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESTRAINT, WE BELIEVE, IS NECESSITY TO PAY SOME HEED TO POPULAR SENTIMENT WHICH DOES NOT FULLY SUPPORT PAST HOSTILE POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ. IN FACT, WE UNDERSTAND RESTORATION OF RELATIONS WITH BAGHDAD WAS WIDELY POPULAR MOVE, SEEN AS OPENING WAY TO PILGRIMAGE TO MOST IMPORTANT SHIA SHRINES WHICH ARE IN IRAQ. IF ACCESS TO THESE WERE TO BE BLOCKED AGAIN, IRANIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD NEED CONVINCING CASE WITH ITS PUBLIC.

D. FOR ITS ARAB POLICY ALSO, IRANIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO APPEAR STATESMANLIKE IN ITS HANDLING OF IRAQI PROBLEM. TO PREVENT EROSION OF CAREFULLY NURTURED POLICY OF COOPERATION WITH ARABS WHO ARE ALREADY SUSPICIOUS OF IRANIAN MILITARY BUILDUP, SHAH MUST ESTABLISH HIS FAIRNESS AND GOOD FAITH IN DEALING WITH IRAQ. WITH DIFFICULT OPEC DECISIONS ON OIL PRICES COMING UP, IRAN DOES NOT WISH UNNECESSARILY TO ALIENATE ORGANIZATION'S ARAB MEMBERSHIP.

5. NEAR-TERM PROSPECT: WITH MELTING OF SNOW, FRONTIER GUARDS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE LINE WILL LEAVE THEIR WINTER QUARTERS AND MOVE TOWARDS THE POORLY-DEMARCATED BORDER. IF THE PAST IS A GUIDE, THEY WILL BRUSH UP AGAINST EACH OTHER AND WE CAN EXPECT THERE WILL BE SKIRMISHES. BUT ON THE IRANIAN SIDE, AT LEAST, THERE WILL BE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS TO PREVENT ESCALATION. WE BELIEVE RESTRAINING FORCES WILL CONTINUE TO CONTROL AND TO LIMIT CONSEQUENCES OF LOCAL ACTIONS.
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